



Praxis: A Writing Center Journal (2003-2011)

Sections

[Focus](#)
[Columns and Reviews](#)
[Consulting](#)
[Training](#)
[News & Announcements](#)

Archives

[Browse past issues of Praxis](#)

About Us

[About Us](#)

Submissions

[Submit an article to Praxis](#)

[Home](#) » [Archives](#) » [Fall 2003 \(Volume 1 Issue 1\) - Who We Are / Writing Centers Feel the Crunch](#)

"So You're a Tutor, Right?"

[Fall 2003 / Consulting](#)

by *Jon-Carlos Evans*

Various people frequently raise one question to me in reference to my job at the Webster University Writing Center: "What do you do?" My response, "I'm a writing coach." A moment of uncomfortable silence ensues and then I'm usually met with a look of confusion, followed by an often insincere and forced expression of understanding. They then say, "So, you're a tutor, right?" Not exactly, but I often find myself complying for the safety of not having to explain myself. The time does arise, though, for all things to be revealed

Possibly, people outside of the Webster circle are thrown off by the term "coach." When one hears and applies the term "coach," it is unavoidably ascribed to the realm of sports. While what we do at the Webster University Writing Center is obviously not linked to sports, we embrace this term for a strong reason. Coaches are leaders, teachers, and possibly mentors,. leading not necessarily by example but more by inspiration—the very philosophy behind our coaching methods. As coaches it is not our job to write papers for students or to simply tell them what is wrong and how to fix it. Instead, we ask questions, provide guidance and above all else investigate each student's writing process.

The only way to help anyone write is to find out both *how* and *why* they write. In the same manner that an athletic coach may determine his players' approach to their batting or shooting, we are also given the task of sizing up each writer's unique process. And this is done in a very simple, straightforward manner: asking questions. If we ask questions, paving the way for students to find their own answers, then the reward is much greater for them. They become endowed with a new understanding of how to approach their writing and how to make it more logical in their own minds. This is essentially the dominant function of coaching because most students do not have problems writing. Instead they have problems focusing and organizing their writing.

Students coming into the Writing Center merely for an editor find themselves sorely disappointed. Editors isolate themselves in a room with the writer's work armed with a knife and chisel, cutting the writing into shape. Theirs is a solitary task usually quite secluded from the writer. What a writing coach provides instead is a partnership. Coaches place themselves neither above nor below the student, but work with an individual to develop his or her writing.. Being a coach is more than proofreading; it's about expanding ideas, discussing what it is to write and what it is to write effectively. While as writing coaches we cannot show where the path ends and provide all the answers, we can show that the path isn't so perilous and that the answers are never out of reach.

Jon-Carlos Evans is a writing coach at Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri.

[◀ Fall 2003 \(Volume 1 Issue 1\) - Who We Are / Writing Centers Feel the Crunch](#) [up](#) [Consulting with Technical Writers ▶](#)

Praxis is a project of the [Undergraduate Writing Center](#) at the University of Texas at Austin

[Editor login](#)